

Library Director as Change Agent

Case Study

To increase scholarship funds available to Admissions and to maintain competitive in the law school market, the dean has instituted an across-the-board, minimum 3% cut in all law school departmental budgets. Due to the library's larger than average share of the law school's budget,¹ the dean has increased the library's cuts to 7%. These cuts are across all lines, including personnel costs as well as operational costs. The dean will defer to each department in how to take those cuts, whether in personnel, operations, or a mixture of the two, but he has asked for final decisions of where the cuts would be taken by each department head in two weeks. The actual cuts themselves would not take place until the start of the next fiscal year, which is six months away.

Cheryl, who was appointed as library director two years ago, left the meeting at which this plan was announced in deep thought. She felt that the cuts could be made, if not without pain, at least without significant damage. As she walked back to her office, she reflected on the library's current operations.

- The library has a staff of twenty, with six currently eligible for retirement and one reaching eligibility within the next year.
- Ten of the staff are in technical services, and this number has not changed despite cancellation of almost all serials. Five of these staff are underutilized, despite attempts to retrain and redeploy them to other areas.
- Two staff, one eligible for retirement (cataloging assistant) and one not (reference librarian), have submitted resignation letters. The salaries and benefits of both positions together make up about 3.5% of the library's budget.
- Over the last year and a half, the library had voluntarily reduced expenses by 15% through the following actions:
- Cancelling all print materials available online in a reliable format, except materials that are routed to faculty or purchased as faculty office copies;
- Joining a consortium and entering into a shared collection development agreement;
- Reducing the number of microform reader/printer and photocopier leases, to better reflect the declining activity in these areas
- Not filling a vacant library clerk position (loose-leaf filer) when the individual in the position retired.
- The changes had been very controversial within the library, upsetting practices that had been in place for more than fifteen years. One staff member had been so unhappy that he had taken his complaints to twitter and to faculty he knew

¹ The library's budget makes up 6% of the law school's budget, which is not high compared to other law schools, but does make it the most costly department in the law school. In terms of overall law school expenses, it falls second, after personnel expenses.

well. The dean, while very pleased with Cheryl for the economies she had developed, was less pleased when accosted by faculty armed with the staff member's complaints.

- Research and instruction requests have increased approximately 10% in each of the last four years, while reference desk requests have fallen by 20% over the same period. The dean has asked if the reference librarians could take a formal role in teaching the research portion of Legal Research & Writing in the coming year.

Cheryl also considered what she had heard in and after the meeting from other department heads.

- Admissions had reported that they were losing 30% of their applicants to schools able to offer more financial aid. They felt that the school was no longer in a position to compete at all for diversity applicants and in a poor position to compete for high credentialed applicants. Based on LSAC numbers on applicants, they expect this trend to continue and the need for more funds to grow.
- Most of the departments outside the library had few discretionary funds. Their 3% could only be taken in narrow areas: personnel, professional development, or general office supplies. They expressed concerns that the dean had not articulated an overall vision for the school, resulting in blunt across-the-board cuts instead of more thoughtful cuts designed to preserve primary law school activities.
- Other departments had mixed feelings towards the library. They were resentful of library's larger budget but also appreciative of the research they performed for any department needing it. Cheryl heard one department head remarking that if they had an additional staff person, they would be able to perform their own research.
- Many departments had not realized that they were routinely going over their budgets each year; they had not been trained in the financial system and had not been notified as they exceeded their allotted amounts.

In private discussions with the dean over the last year, Cheryl had also gained some understanding of his thoughts on the library.

- He feels that the school should be focusing on practice and less on scholarship. While he wanted to continue to support scholarship for faculty, he believes that the curriculum (and the collection) should shift significantly towards practical skills.
- His research interests make it possible for him to rely solely on online resources, so he struggles to understand why the library still maintains so much in print and why it continues to have so many personnel.
- The dean appreciates the cuts Cheryl has already made, but constantly asks if more are possible.

She has not shared any of this information with her staff or faculty colleagues, nor has she mentioned to the dean or to her staff the university librarian's (UL) repeated offers to perform ordering, processing, and cataloging tasks for the law library. The UL would want the law school to fund one full-time position at the main

library should such an arrangement be reached, and the UL would absorb any additional costs from her budget. Cheryl knows that the UL's technical services department is generally more in touch with current practices (e.g., RDA) than the law library's staff.

Nearing her office, she starts to run rough calculations of the various possibilities.

What should Cheryl do?